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Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

Advancement of women

Promotion and protection of human rights

Letter dated 9 July 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to enclose herewith the Sofia Declaration of Commitment, adopted on 28 May 2015 by Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Ukraine during a regional conference hosted by Bulgaria on the theme "Promoting health and rights, reducing inequalities: towards better sexual and reproductive health outcomes in Eastern Europe and Central Asia" (see annex).

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly, under agenda items 13, 27 and 68.

(*Signed*) Stephan **Tafrov**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the United Nations

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Annex to the letter dated 9 July 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Sofia declaration of commitment

We, the 140 participants from 19 countries, representing Governments, parliaments, civil society, young people and academia, gathered in Sofia for the regional conference on the theme "Promoting health and rights, reducing inequalities: towards better sexual and reproductive health outcomes in Eastern Europe and Central Asia" to review the progress made and identify priorities in advancing sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights in the region and to discuss the synergies between the International Conference on Population and Development Beyond 2014 regional review outcomes and the post-2015 development agenda;

We reaffirm the continued relevance and importance of the International Conference on Population and Development and its Programme of Action, the International Conference on Population and Development Beyond 2014 regional and global reviews, and the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women;

We endorse the outcomes of the high-level regional conference on the theme "Enabling choices: population priorities for the twenty-first century", held in Geneva in July 2013 as the culmination of the International Conference on Population and Development Beyond 2014 regional review;

We welcome the significant progress made since the adoption of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994, particularly in terms of reducing maternal mortality, improving the quality of services and increasing the availability of modern contraceptives;

We also recognize that many challenges remain, as highlighted by the International Conference on Population and Development Beyond 2014 regional review, including the increase in HIV infections, the low use of modern contraception and the high level of teenage pregnancies;

We recognize that sexual and reproductive health plays a central role in development and that investing in the health and rights of women and girls is smart economics for families, communities and nations. We also acknowledge that sexual and reproductive health makes a significant contribution to sustainable development, building resilient societies, advancing gender equality and ensuring social justice;

We recognize the indivisibility and universality of all human rights, applicable to all people without distinction;

During our deliberations we identified the following priorities in advancing sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights and in reducing inequalities in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In order to make progress on the priorities, we need to:

1. Increase political attention to and investment in sexual and reproductive health, with a particular focus on prevention;

2. Ensure sustainable universal access to the full range of quality sexual and reproductive health services as part of health system transformations towards the progressive realization of universal health coverage, recognizing it as an investment rather than a cost;

3. Promote sexual and reproductive health and protect reproductive rights throughout the life course, including for persons outside of reproductive age, recognizing the particular needs in early adolescence and, in the context of ageing populations in the region, of older persons;

4. Ensure that sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights interventions, policies and programmes pay close attention to the socioeconomic context in which people live and the interactions between biological, behavioural, psychosocial and environmental factors over the life course;

5. Prioritize family planning, including the availability of affordable and acceptable modern contraceptives, accessible at the primary health-care level, recognizing that evidence in the region shows that family planning does not reduce fertility levels;

6. Prioritize the sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights of young people by ensuring access to comprehensive sexuality education and youth-friendly services, including modern contraceptives, to empower young people and minimize ill health in later stages of life;

7. Reduce morbidity and mortality in women of reproductive age, knowing that most of it is entirely preventable when given the appropriate attention and investments, by effectively addressing the leading causes;

8. Focus a comprehensive and integrated response addressing sexual and reproductive health, HIV and co-morbidities on key populations at higher risk of HIV and populations highly vulnerable to HIV, including young people and migrants;

9. Promote a human-rights-based approach to sexual and reproductive health, including by sensitizing health-care providers and law enforcement, to reduce inequalities and ensure that no one is left behind;

10. Strengthen regional collaboration for advancing the International Conference on Population and Development agenda through innovative partnerships and solutions.

We call for the integration of the results of the International Conference on Population and Development Beyond 2014 review into the post-2015 development agenda, with a particular focus on ensuring better sexual and reproductive health outcomes for all, towards more just and equal societies.

We pledge to accelerate the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development through the post-2015 agenda by committing to:

1. Remove all barriers preventing people from accessing quality sexual and reproductive health information, services and commodities, according to their needs;

2. Implement effective and evidence-based policies and programmes related to sexual and reproductive health that respond to the needs of all generations and population groups by applying a life-course approach;

3. Develop normative frameworks and support multisectoral collaboration, involving civil society, in promoting health and well-being, with a focus on sexual and reproductive health;

4. Advocate for adequate national budget allocations, in the context of a responsible transition from official development assistance, to ensure the sustainable implementation of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights-related policies and programmes by the public, non-governmental and private sectors, with the objective that no one is left behind;

5. Promote the collection and use of disaggregated data and qualitative information to inform the formulation of evidence-based sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights-related policies and programmes and monitor their implementation;

6. Strengthen the integration of sexual and reproductive health services at the primary health-care level, aiming at the prevention of complications of pregnancy and delivery, the provision of quality antenatal care, addressing unmet needs for family planning, in particular modern contraceptives, and preventing unintended pregnancies, cervical cancer, and HIV and other sexually transmitted infections;

7. Increase investments in the sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights of young people, in particular for girls, young women and key populations, including by providing comprehensive sexuality education and access to youth-friendly services and commodities;

8. Scale up measures for the appropriate decentralization of HIV and AIDS programmes to improve access for communities, including rural and underserved populations, and the integration of HIV and AIDS programmes into primary health care and sexual and reproductive health-care services;

9. Intensify the transfer of knowledge, technology and expertise among countries and develop and implement cross-border initiatives that advance the International Conference on Population and Development Beyond 2014 agenda;

10. Promote community empowerment for marginalized and vulnerable populations at the local, regional and national levels;

11. Integrate the provision of sexual and reproductive health as part of a global health approach in emergency situations and emergency preparedness;

12. Address gender-based and sexual violence as an issue in its own right and as an exacerbating factor affecting sexual and reproductive health.

We call upon the Government of Bulgaria and the United Nations Population Fund to forward the present declaration to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Co-Chairs of the intergovernmental negotiation process on the post-2015 development agenda as a contribution of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region to the discussions on the future development framework.